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# The Workshop

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PROF. W. BAUMER, I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

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## ON ITALIAN RENAISSANCE IN ITS RELATIONS TO ARCHITECTURE AND THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS.

An equally beautiful style of treatment is illustrated by another, though somewhat later group of buildings, richly ornamented by decoration in Sgraffiti (in a still later period superseded by painting), their most marked peculiarity being an open, flat-roofed colonnade under the cornice, a very charming and artistic arrangement, giving even to smaller buildings a palatial appearance. The same characteristic feature of colonnades or ranges of arcades, superimposed one on another, sometimes through three stories, is further worked out and perfected in all the great courts of palaces and cloisters. The earliest examples are again Brunelleschi's beautiful, cloistered courts; of very simple but noble conception, they produce the highest artistic effect by the purity and beauty of proportion, and the great elegance and lively play of architectural forms and lines. Bramante very ingeniously introduced beautifully designed pillars in these courts. The columns, never fluted, are adorned with ever-varying capitals of graceful luxuriousness, the walls and vaulting of the peristyle always richly painted with frescoes and arabesque work, the architectural mouldings being sometimes also relieved and marked by coloring.

Reviewing the decorative styles of the Renaissance, we are at first dazzled by the exuberance of genius displayed after the short and uncongenial reign of Gothic Art, an importation from the North, which had never thoroughly taken root in the South. Then indeed, enamoured by the masterworks of antiquity, by the view of its priceless remains, daily excavated and exhibited, a profusion of new and original creations of decorative art sprang up, which now only, after the lapse of centuries, can be fully appreciated. Grand, old, Classical Art, having for more than five hundred years continually exercised her creative power, had stored up and transmitted to posterity innumerable treasures.

Indeed what an astonishing richness of graceful motives do we see, if we cast our eye on the capitals of the columns removed into the Roman basilicas from the Ancient temples which they used to grace, on their monuments, altars, fragments of doorways, friezes, and cornices, which are still extant. The Renaissance laid

hold on all this, adding her own powerful genius, and entering with the same fire and energy into the imperishable beauties of nature.

No wonder therefore that we find during this period all the forms of ornamentation combined which the human mind is able to embrace; above all the architectural structures show great dignity and repose, being the results of a judicious and keen understanding, which laid the decorative features principally round doorways, windows, and in those mighty vaults and domes, enriched with deep coffered and boldly carved flowers, which in the blended and broken light produce a most mysterious and magnificent impression on the mind.

Amongst the most beautiful examples of their kind must be mentioned the Porch of Pazzi-Chapel, erected by Brunelleschi, or that of the Pietro Massimi Palace at Rome by Baldassare Peruzzi. This porch, supported on the outside by simple Tuscan columns, recedes from the sombre, rusticated façade, the interior being covered by a flat, richly coffered ceiling, further enriched with niches, elegant stone seats, and a beautiful doorway.

If we examine the capitals, mouldings, archivolts etc. we find there a rich, but judiciously distributed ornamentation of exquisite finish and workmanship in its most minute details, richly carved mouldings, flowers, dentils, frets, lions'-heads etc. giving charm, brilliancy and life to the whole. The doorways especially belong to the most splendid productions of that period; the ornamental parts are either deeply sunk, or entirely subordinated to the architectural framework, and display a luxuriant richness of vegetable types, represented by a multitude of natural plants arranged in scrolls or bunches, and animated by birds, butterflies, lizards, etc., while some artists introduced into their arabesque work Classical conventionalised foliage, combined with arms, trophies, genii, tragic and comic masks, hybrid marine monsters, and chimeras.

These doorways, in most cases formerly painted and gilt, prepare the mind for an introduction into the Renaissance sanctuary. The whole interior, as is the case in Antique and Mediæval buildings, is of course

resplendant of dazzling colors and gold; but in opposition to the elements of Gothic styles, in which Architecture is preeminently dominant, the Sister Arts, Painting and Sculpture, are allowed free scope at the side of Architecture, although all three are intimately associated, thus producing a most wonderful and harmonious effect. But then all the decorative features, vaults, monuments, altars, notwithstanding the most elaborate finish and richness of detail, exhibit a grand and noble sobriety of arrangement. Unfortunately only very few of these interiors have preserved their entire original decoration, and where they have, they are generally only smaller constructions as; e. g., the Mausoleum of the Cardinal of Portugal (ob. 1459) erected by Antonio Rosellino on the northern aisle of S. Miniato al Monte, near Florence.

What a profusion of choice and costly materials is here! the Florentine sandstone or Macigno, white and colored marble, gilding, frescoes, terra-cottas, splendid mosaics for the pavement, of more delicate design for the ceiling, everything most skilfully combined to produce a structure which, with all its exuberant richness, and splendour of ornamentation, displays great chasteness and elegance of form. In the vault of that very chapel, forming a small cupola on pendentives, we behold a beautiful example of decorative art; the calotte is formed by five large plates, or tiles of baked, enamelled clay, with beautiful, floating figures of angels, the little spandrels filled in with gold mosaics, the soffits of the four arches, and the frieze of the entablature being adorned with exquisite fresco-paintings, all this relieved by ornamental and statuary sculpture work, leads on to the marble monument, where the corpse of the departed, as if in deep slumber, is extended on a rich sarcophagus. Certainly great artistic skill and refinement is required to create a work of like signification. Here all the leading features are in themselves master-pieces of their kind, which combine to build up a work of Art of great magnificence, harmony, and perfection of form, the smallest details of mouldings or arabesque work showing the same refined sense for the effect of form, color and light, displayed in the most exquisite frescoes and marble statues which grow out of the architectural groundwork.

Especially the numerous sepulchral monuments of the Renaissance period, consisting of marble structures, often mere slabs, and always fixed in, or projecting from the wall, show most exquisite arabesque work, which owes its graceful elegance, besides the charm of invention, to the delicate modelling of the surface in flowing designs of foliage, stems and flowers. Delicate tendrils, encircling here a little bud, there an expanding flower, suddenly rise with sharp upright edges from the ground; elegantly shaped leaves and branches, growing out of the parent stem, and appearing like slight undulations of the surface, are wrought with knobs of enrichment in bold relief, all different in design, and worked from natural types.

Only a faint and pale glitter remains now of the greatest achievements of the Decorative Art of the Renaissance, of that grand association of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting; — as, e. g., in Raphael's Loggie of the Vatican, and in Villa Madama near Rome; — which is

suggested by the Antique treatment of interior decoration, especially by the Baths of Titus, then a favourite object of study. Here indeed great perfection of form and harmony of color pervades the whole, the first principle being to mark the great masses of vaults and walls. Over their surface, in marvellous brightness of light and color, in all the fascinating brilliancy of life, are spread a profusion of natural foliage, wreaths of flowers, and fruit, interspersed with masks, dancing amorini, demons, fabulous monsters and animals, charming landscape, mythological subjects of every kind, following and interlacing each other, and framing, sometimes painted, sometimes executed in white, gilt, or colored stucco, those great pictures on religious subjects which fill the centres of vaults and ceilings. And no less a person than Raphael Sanzio planned these creations; in his Court of the Loggie he displays in a small space the inexhaustible force of vegetable and animal nature, contributing to a work of faultless harmony and gentle elegance.

When, in a later period, the decorative ornament was made less fine and appropriate, a want of breadth and repose pervaded the whole. The old Classical specimens also, so far as preserved, exhibit the same exquisite treatment and wonderful richness of imagination. The brilliant effect of the relief ornament in stucco is further heightened by the peculiarity of the material, which allows the artist to add his work of taste and fancy, by rendering immediately his most delicate impressions in a soft and plastic mass. Indeed we find here everywhere the stamp of originality, only the main features being designed beforehand; and for the rest, free scope is given to the artistic genius, so that an individuality and freshness of thought speak to our mind in even the smallest of these creations.

We can have no exact representation of the productions of Art-Industry during this period, much of the Italian Cinque-cento work being lost, or hidden in the interior of houses. But, it is unquestionable that Art had attained a degree of perfection, superior to that of the old Classical, at least of the Ancient Roman style. The most remarkable of these productions in terra-cotta, wood, and metal-work rank amongst the noblest conceptions of high Art. In other words, Italian Cinque-cento work leads through all the forms of decorative ornament, of the purely conventional, or vegetable, and animal types, to the form *«par excellence»*, viz., the representation of the human; a noble tendency discernible even in works of an unpretentious and modest character, when such men as Giotto, Orcagna, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Alberti, da Vinci, Raphael, Michael-Angelo and others contribute to their production. Thus the great sculptor Luca della Robbia appears at Florence about the same time as Brunelleschi, establishing the manufacture of glazed earthenware. He furnishes Brunelleschi the enamelled tiles for the splendid cupola over the porch of Pazzi Chapel (about 1420); he produces the beautiful frieze medallions in that chapel, and complete altars, besides a series of pictures of the holy Virgin, generally framed by luxuriant wreaths of fruit, and flowers. The colors are simply yellow, green, blue,

violet and white, the glazing exceedingly thin, the ground of the reliefs being a light smalt blue. His invention, handed down from nephews to grandnephews, was practised with the same high perfection till 1527 when the last of the Robbias died of the plague, after having filled the churches and villas of Tuscany with their modest but unsurpassed productions. It is remarkable how all these little gems, although made by hand, and always showing the same ideas and forms, are nevertheless marked by originality of design, and novelty of invention, being the true expression of the artistic genius of that period.

Suggested by the Della Robbia ware, there arose at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the manufacture of majolica, principally practised in Pesaro, Castel-Durante and Faenza, and showing also the same colors. The best of these productions, chiefly consisting of great, flat dishes, fruit stands, saltcellars etc., show no figures, but very elegant arabesque work, though sparingly used, sometimes painted, sometimes in low relief. Pictorial subjects of high artistic value are also frequently represented from designs of Raphael, Giulio Romano etc. All these specimens, combining truth with beauty of form, do not pretend to be more than what they really are, viz., vessels which perfectly answer their purpose.

Except a number of most magnificent candelabra not much remains now of the art of the metal worker of that period, and hardly anything of those gold and silver objects which Benvenuto Cellini praises so highly. A few relics that are left, a saltcellar, a few candlesticks in the treasury of St. Peter's, a little chiselled steelkey in the possession of the Strozzi family justify, no doubt, the enthusiastic terms which the artist himself lavishes upon them. The severe forms are replaced by flowing lines, gracefully curved; the flat surface, enriched by masks, foliage, and renderings of animal types of great daring and energy, is relieved by little panels, with most exquisite bassi-reliefs; everything worked with great care and high finish, like the works of nature, loses nothing when seen under the magnifying glass. In this later period there appear also vessels of hard and costly stone and cut crystal, foot, handle, neck and top, enriched with enamels in gold and precious stones, which are, without disturbing the graceful contours, in perfect harmony with the natural color of the material. Of great magnificence are also the steel armours and helmets, damascened or inlaid in gold or silver, with rich surface ornamentation, and sometimes of delicate relief, which exercise an unmistakable influence on stone arabesques and other architectural ornament of later date.

Mosaic work, although of very ancient origin, was then extensively practised, representing in inlaid wood, until the end of the last century, the principal enrichment of our furniture. This branch of art demands great refinement of taste and excellence of workmanship, but it furnishes a very appropriate and beautiful decoration of the flat surface, forming a very interesting contrast with relief ornament.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the *intarsia* or marquetry work appears in Siena and Umbria, and in the year 1478 Florence possesses as many

as eighty-four *intarsiatori* and other cabinet makers. Again it is the great Brunelleschi to whom the development of this art is ascribed. The decorative types are of great variety, embracing frets and lineal ornament, beautiful natural flowers, bouquets, birds, and human figures, boys holding festoons etc.; of frequent occurrence also, especially for choir stalls, is the inlay of those perspective views which form the favourite subjects for the backgrounds of the Cinque-cento pictures.

The ordinary furniture, viz., bedsteads, chests, benches, etc., mostly of pear and chestnut, were of strong and massive construction, enriched with ornament in bold relief, and exhibiting high monumental dignity, combined with great simplicity of design; but between these severe forms, there appears always the bright and joyous play of inlaid and colored wood. Of most monumental appearance were especially the beds of state, projecting from the middle of the wall, and the chests which were sometimes manufactured by the most renowned masters; which pieces of furniture were usually ornamented with paintings. A room of this epoch, of a preeminently quiet and comfortable aspect, may be described as follows. The floor was covered with soft carpets; the flat, wooden ceiling, handsomely carved, showing coffers or compartments, with paintings and gilt floral ornament; the walls, covered with gorgeous tapestry, woven fabrics, silk hangings, embossed and gilt leather, or rich wainscoting, were furnished with bedsteads, chests, cabinets, and other furniture which was enriched by marquetry, coloring and gilding, especially strings and cornices; and on rich dressers a show of magnificent vessels of alabaster, porphyry, serpentine, and majolica.

Such was the interior of the mansion. The outside showed wide-spread lawns and parks; the sloping ground, skilfully arranged in terraces with broad steps leading to the chief entrances, was enlivened by the merry play of cascades, whose noisy waters, descending from terrace-walls and parapets, were thrown from shell to shell, or spit out from marine monsters; little sideways led into fresh groves with high fountains, or into kiosks and casinos of airy construction, whose lofty vaults adorned with frescoes allowed the eye to rest in the far distance on the mountains, and on the blue sea; or they abutted in an exedra, or crescentformed theatre leaning against the slope, with arched cool grottoes receding into the mountain, and sparkling with shells and stone-mosaic. Dispersed amongst all this were picturesque groups of noble trees: the laurels, oaks, cypresses and pines spreading their dark, evergreen foliage over the grounds, in which, with a true appreciation of the beauties of nature, the principal roads and avenues were so directed as to lead on to the most beautiful sites of the lovely scenery.

The days of the highest development of Art were not destined to last beyond the taking of Rome in the year 1527. From that time a chilling torpor runs through all the architectural productions, and begins to sever Architecture from Decorative Art. The former confines itself more and more to its own sphere of rigid and conventional forms, the latter, given up to itself, indulges in most audacious and vulgar caprice; but reaction setting in, it borrows again from Architecture, introdu-

cing all sorts of distortions and contortions. The architectural structures lose in their turn their decorative ornament, the mouldings their enriched beads, pearls, egg and tongue ornament, etc. Losing the elegant sweep of profile, they are bent, broken, curved and twisted; columns, pillars and pilasters, no more surmounted by their ever-varying, charming capitals, are grouped into two, three or four. Yet a certain unity and harmony of style is still discernable, and the Rococo period also produces characteristic and ingenious structures which, although suggestive of their age of licentiousness, show, especially in the interior, grand spaces, largely designed, carefully and harmoniously arranged and decorated throughout.

Of great interest is the comparison of the gradual decay of the Renaissance with that of the Middle Ages. Mediæval Art, which in its most flourishing days pursued a similar course to the Renaissance, falls at last into the same errors as Rococo. The original, constructive signification of the architectural features is soon lost sight of, they become overcharged with ornament, and sink down to the rank of mere decorative vagaries. Thus it comes to pass that Gothic Art, striving after lightness, degenerates by degrees into forms of excessive thinness

and poverty, while the Renaissance, based on Antique principles, assumes proportions of great massiveness and heaviness.

Only with the beginning of this century everything goes out of joint; the ancient hallowed traditions disappear, each follows his own way, or follows none at all; everything is to be done anew, and we are in the same position as if we had lost the power of speech, we are without *style*. Two things may save us. First an earnest study of early Italian Renaissance, which combines the excellence of former periods in Art; showing in its creations a noble simplicity, and manly vigour of style, it can, imbued with a new and fresh life, and prompted by a new and energetic spirit, be adapted to nearly all the modern wants and exigencies of private and public life. A second means may be sought in the restless activity and productiveness of modern Industry. Through the stupendous discoveries and inventions and the progress in technical science during this century, the process of manufacture, the treatment and the manipulation of the material, have entered into an entirely new phase; new thoughts and forms, never before entertained, are worked out and perfected, which, being merged into Architecture and Art industry, are thus brought to fruition.

## SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1.

No. 1. Romanesque Style; Foliated Stringcourse from Bonn Cathedral.